

Wisconsin
Department of Natural Resources
OUTDOOR REPORT

Edited by Paul Holtan
Wisconsin DNR
PO Box 7921
Madison WI 53707-7921
(608) 267-7517
fax: (608) 264-6293
e-mail: holtap@dnr.state.wi.us
World Wide Web: <http://dnr.wi.gov>

Outdoor Report as of March 31, 2005

With recent warm temperatures, snow is disappearing fast from the state and lakes in southern Wisconsin have begun to open up and ice is rapidly deteriorating across the rest of the state. Snowmobiling and skiing is essentially over even in the far north, where trails were reported as either closed or in poor condition. Madison's Lake Monona was half open as of early this week, and smaller lakes in southeastern Wisconsin were either open, or had open shorelines.

In the north, lakes ice depth still ranged from 20 to 22 inches, but most of the snow cover has melted and travel conditions were very sloppy. Bluegill and crappie fishing was beginning to pick up as a result of the thaw, but was still being reported as slow in many areas. Water was beginning to run into ice holes, which tends to trigger a bite near ice-out. Perch fishing has been spotty but a few lakes have been producing out over mud flats.

Shorelines are opening up and ice conditions have been reduced to foot travel only on the Winnebago system lakes where walleye fishing has been decent.

With ice breaking up, a lot of fishing activity has switched to rivers. River Systems were opening up statewide, but the North Fork of the Flambeau River was still primarily iced-in as of this week and the Wolf River was still frozen from Shiocton down. The Lake Superior tributary opener last weekend saw lots of anglers and some catches of rainbow and brown trout. The water is getting some color now with the faster waters from the melt off from the snow.

Along Lake Michigan, the Oconto River is opening up slowly and some trout anglers were testing the waters below the Stiles dam. Much of the Manitowoc River remains ice covered. Anglers found some open water on the Branch River, but success was limited. The East Twin River is opening up and anglers were having some success for steelhead below the Mishicot dam. Walleye action has been decent on the Fox River, but most of the fish have been males caught in the depths of the channel indicating peak spawning is yet to come. In the southeast, flows on the Root River have been good, and anglers have been reporting success in the morning hours for steelhead along with a few browns.

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The Mississippi River and lower Wisconsin River water levels rose considerably this week with snowmelt. The Mississippi's main channels is open and barge traffic has started so boaters should use caution. Walleye and sauger action was slower this week on the Mississippi but picked up some portions of the lower Wisconsin.

As the snow melts from forest and field rural residents and visitors are reminded that burning permits are needed to burn leaves, brush, and other woody debris. The permits can be obtained from any Department of Natural Resources Service Center or Emergency Fire Warden. The permits stipulate what, when, where and how a person can burn debris.

With the warm up, people are reminded that many recreational trails for bicycling, mountain biking and ATV operation are closed during thawing periods to protect the trail surfaces. Using trails when they are wet and soft can cause damage that requires costly repairs later. Please respect trail closures and refrain from even hiking on trails if you sink into the trail surface.

Almost all 2004-2005 licenses expire this week on March 31; 2005-2006 licenses are available at DNR service centers and about 1,500 vendors statewide, or by credit card over the phone or through the DNR Web site.

Black bears have been seen moving about so it is time to remove bird feeders and secure garbage and pet food in bear country. Most buck deer have now shed their antlers. Tom turkeys are starting to form harems. Very large numbers of waterfowl continue to migrate through the state. Loons were seen on Madison area lakes this week; mallards, canvasback wood ducks, mergansers, and lots of Canada geese are being seen. The first tree swallows returned to Horicon Marsh this week, where skunk cabbage is just emerging in the marshes and willow buds have cracked open.

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A three-minute audio version of this report can be heard by calling (608) 266-2277.

A new report is put on the line each week.

DNR Northern Region

Superior DNR Service Center area

Brule River State Forest - Spring is in the air...temperatures in the 50s and 60s are rapidly melting the snow. The Afterhours Ski Trail is no longer being maintained for skiing this season...an end to yet another great ski season! More signs of spring this past week include the return of robins and red winged black birds to many areas. Canada geese, mallards, herring gulls, and ring-billed gulls have begun returning to the St. Louis River estuary in Superior. The turkeys that were released last year have been heard gobbling. The Trout opener north of Hwy. 2 was said to be very good on the first day with several very nice fish caught. The water is getting some color now with the faster waters from the melt off from the snow. Outdoor enthusiasts can help themselves prepare for the spring and summer by attending the annual Douglas County Fish & Game League's Sports Show at Wessman Arena in Superior, April 1 to 3. The Douglas County Fish & Game League is celebrating their Centennial Anniversary this year! People attending the Sports Show are encouraged to stop by the DNR booth to visit with their location Wildlife Managers, Fisheries Managers, and Conservation Officers. Most snowmobile trails (including the Brule/St. Croix Trail) officially closed as of Sunday, March 27.

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Pattison Falls State Park - As of March 28, the snow depth was about 12 inches. Cross-country ski trails were last groomed March 18 and were in poor to fair condition. There are a few bare areas; icy spots are common. There is still some good skiing in the woods.

Ashland DNR Service Center area

The Lake Superior tributary opener last weekend saw lots of anglers and some catches of rainbow and brown trout. The annual car count on the Brule River was at 266 vehicles, which is about average. Water levels were slightly down but with warmer weather in the forecast water levels should increase. Anglers on the Brule practice catch and release and most of the anglers contacted stated they were having a good time fishing. Inland lakes have been producing panfish. Ice conditions can change rapidly this time of year so anglers should use caution on the ice. Anglers on the Turtle Flambeau Flowage have been having luck on panfish. The flowage has a bag and size limit on panfish and anglers should make sure to follow the regulations to avoid a citation. Lake Superior anglers were still pursuing lake trout and salmon. The ice is free of snow cover and with warmer weather the ice fishing will soon come to an end. The snowmobile season is finished unless the area gets a large snowstorm. ATV operators will see some areas closed this time of year. Spring breakup causes soft conditions on the trails and some roadways and ATV traffic this time of year can cause excessive damage. People seem ready for spring and the prospect of getting the boats out on open water. All the tributary streams and smaller streams are opening up and larger concentrations of ducks, geese, and some swans are arriving daily. With the snow melt and areas of grass showing there are large numbers of deer concentrated along roadways. Many are getting struck by vehicles. It is wise to slow down this time of year. Large numbers of deer are being seen feeding in the evening in many open farm fields in the area.

Spooner DNR Service Center area

The recent stretch of warm weather has effectively closed all snowmobile and ATV trails in the area. ATV operators are reminded to contact their local DNR office or County Recreation office to determine the ATV trail regulations in each county. Most counties prohibit ATV operation until after the spring break-up. Numerous migrating birds are returning to northern Wisconsin. This is a great time to view waterfowl as they have some excellent plumage when they return to the north. Mallards, wood ducks, geese and mergansers have been observed throughout the area. A small flock of sandhill cranes were also observed along with the first robin report in the Shell Lake area. Fishing continues to be excellent. Most panfish lakes such as Clam, Big Chetac, Red Cedar and Long Lake are producing very nice catches of bluegills and crappies. Crappies were biting best on a small jig with a minnow around dusk. The fish and game spring hearings will be on Monday, April 11, in each county in the state. This is an excellent opportunity for people to provide feedback and vote on which rules that would like to have passed. As the snow cover disappears people are reminded to stop and their local fire wardens to obtain a burning permit. The permits allow burning from 6 p.m. until midnight with the exception of Sundays and holidays when no burning is permitted. Not all material can be burned. Ask your local fire warden or DNR Service center for specific details.

Cumberland DNR Service Center area

The snow has melted in the fields but there is still 4 to 6 inches in the woods. The rivers are all open and there is a good amount of water standing in some fields. Along with mallards, common mergansers, hooded mergansers, and wood ducks are being seen on the rivers. Trumpeter swans have been seen by Cushing and a large flock of tundra swans was observed in a field east of Rice Lake. Canada geese are pairing up and some of the first broods will be seen by the first week of May. Great blue herons have returned to a rookery on the north edge of Rice Lake in Barron County. Black bears have been seen moving about and they may soon begin to visit bird feeders. Deer appear to be in excellent shape, as expected with a Winter Severity Index of only 32, which is very mild. Good fawn production and survival can be expected with an index in the range. Antler development is usually above average following a mild winter.

Park Falls DNR Service Center area

Unseasonably warm weather has greatly diminished snow levels in the Park Falls area. Warm weather and some precipitation are predicted for this week so the snow and ice will soon be gone. Frost is beginning to melt in the soil and forest road conditions are poor in some areas. Care should be taken when driving a vehicle in forested areas to avoid getting stuck and to avoid rutting roads and causing soil erosion in sensitive areas. Sandhill cranes have been seen and heard returning to the area. Take some time to observe the cranes as they begin their courtship rituals and perform a series of dances and calls in the open fields. Small groups of geese have begun returning and can be seen where open water is available. Robins have also been spotted working among the clutter on exposed grassy areas. Ice fishing has been slow to fair though activity should increase since the snow cover has melted off the ice. Unfortunately, ice conditions are quickly deteriorating and ice fishing opportunities won't last much longer. Use extreme caution when venturing out on the ice.

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Check the condition of ice as you go and be aware of quickly changing ice conditions. ATV enthusiasts are reminded of the spring closure order on the Chequamegon National Forest between March 15 and April 30, which prohibits use of ATVs, motor bikes, horses, and mountain bikes on forest trails. Maple syrup collection is underway and conditions have been favorable. Licenses expire on March 31 and the 2005 license are currently available at your local vendor. Be sure to purchase a 2005 license before spring fishing season begins.

Upper Chippewa Basin fisheries report (Price, Rusk, Sawyer Taylor and inland Ashland and Iron counties)

- Ice conditions on Northwoods lakes have deteriorated some with the warm weather of the last few days, but ice depths still ranged from 20 to 22 inches as of March 29. Most of the snow cover has melted off of the lakes and the thaw was just beginning to cut into the ice pack. Travel conditions were very sloppy and most access was being done by ATVs or foot travel. Any ice anglers should be very cautious as access and ice conditions can change in a hurry with the warm temperatures. Late-season panfish anglers have had limited success in the last week. Fishing conditions have been excellent with the milder weather but area anglers have reported very slow action. Most anglers have had to work to just get a fish or two per trip, with only a few anglers reporting decent catches of crappie and perch. The water has begun to run down the holes, so action should get better in the next week if ice conditions continue to hold up.

Flambeau River State Forest - Signs of spring are starting to be seen in the area. The first robins have returned. Locals are tapping maple trees and should see a good run with the warmer temperatures predicted for the week. The deer ticks are out. The north fork of the Flambeau River is still mostly ice covered, but will most likely open within the next couple of weeks. The Flambeau Hills ski trail was packed and groomed last Tuesday and was in fair condition, with icy conditions in the early a.m., but is quickly deteriorating with the warming temperatures.

Woodruff DNR Service Center area

Warm temperatures the past few days have reduced snow depth and left standing water on most lakes. Snowmobile and skiing activity is on hold right now and may be over for the year. The warm days and cold nights are great conditions for maple syruping right now. Fishing activity is improving with crappie activity reported throughout the area. Lake conditions vary with lots of water on the surface and some areas having slush problems. Area anglers and guides are gearing up for the upcoming opening of fishing season. Sports shows are being held this time of year. This is a great time to get out with your kids and start thinking about preparing for annual fishing and boating traditions. March 31 is the expiration date of 2004-05 hunting and fishing licenses. April 11 is the date for the Spring Fish and Wildlife Rules Hearings and Conservation Congress Meetings. These hearings are held in every county of the state beginning at 7 p.m. People who are busy tending yards and dealing with after winter clean up chores; need to remember that burning permits are required once the snow cover goes. Permits are available at area service centers. There are two types of permits: one for burning brush, which is a three day permit, and one for burning paper in a burn barrel. The permits allow burning from 6 p.m. until midnight with the exception of Sundays and holidays when no burning is permitted. Remember that careless outdoor/debris burning is the major cause behind wildfires. For lakeshore property owners planning spring projects such as repairing of piers and construction of swim rafts, information is available at DNR service centers related to the construction/placement of piers, swim rafts and water trampolines. There are specific guidelines and regulations involved in connection with the construction and placement of these objects on the waters. The spring wildflowers will soon be appearing and those who enjoy hikes in the woods or along the roadsides will enjoy the annual floral displays that will begin to unfold. One of the early arrivals will be the trailing arbutus, the wood violets and the marsh marigolds. Please remember people may not pick wildflowers from public land. Instead, take a camera along and record and record their beauty for future enjoyment.

Upper Wisconsin Basin fisheries report (Oneida, Vilas, Lincoln, Langlade, Forest and Florence counties) -

Despite warm temperatures in the upper 50s this week, ice conditions remained good. There were still vehicles roaming about on area lakes, but ice strength will begin to deteriorate with rain in the forecast and continued warm temps. Bluegill and crappie fishing has picked up as a result of the recent thaw -- water is beginning to run into holes, which tends to trigger a bite near ice-out. Anglers that were fishing weed humps or weed edges were doing best. Though most weeds are laying down near the bottom from lack of sunlight all winter, these still tend to be the best areas, as they provide some level of cover. Small minnows on jig rods or "tip downs" are popular now for crappie. Bluegill anglers were doing well using plastics and rocker jigs tipped with a spike or wax worm. Perch fishing has been spotty but a few lakes have been producing out over mud flats. Anglers were using a small jigging Rapala or minnows for the best action. Fishing for panfish should improve over the next couple weeks until the ice becomes unsafe.

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Antigo DNR Service Center area

Langlade County - All snowmobile trails closed last week Friday in Langlade County. Cross-country ski trails are still open but are poor at best, but still provide winter access and walking trails. Spring is a great time to observe all kinds of spring migrant wildlife. Deer cause highway problems at all times of the year but, spring has definitely sprung and lots of small mammals not seen for the last four months are now starting to show up on our highways again. There have been more reports of bear, raccoons, skunks and porcupines back out on the roads again. Caution is advised. A lot of migrant raptors have been seen in the area, along with some waterfowl activity back in the area. Take the time to enjoy the spring wildlife as they emerge from their winter hideaways and migrate back through the area.

DNR Northeastern Region

Peshtigo DNR Service Center area

Marinette County - Warm temperatures and plenty of sunshine are wearing down the snow accumulations. Wetlands are beginning to fill-in with snowmelt. Area waters are showing gray ice and areas of open waters. A few early arrivals of ducks have been heard in the southern part of the county. Turkeys are vocalizing more noticeably, with some jakes pursuing hens already. The frost is beginning to work out of the ground making backroad traveling muddy and wet, be prepared for soft ground on unpaved roads.

Oconto County - The Oconto River is opening up slowly with gray ice and open waters growing. Some trout anglers were testing the waters below the Stiles Dam area on the Oconto River. Waterbirds are arriving with the arrival of the spring thaw. Blackbirds, sandhill cranes and ducks are being observed.

Shawano County - Geese are coming back slowly along with sandhill cranes. Red-winged blackbirds, meadowlarks, bluebirds, woodducks have been spotted. Deer are moving to fields as snowmelt diminishes. Warming water temperature will trigger the sturgeon spawning activity later this month on the Wolf River.

Green Bay DNR Service Center area

Brown County - Walleye action has been pretty decent on the Fox River, despite the lower than normal temperatures in the last few weeks, which have also kept the water temps down (there is still some ice along some of the shoreline). Nearly 90 percent of fish caught have been males in the 16-18 inch range, but the larger females will start to show up as the temperatures warm up in the next few days. Peak of the spawn is yet to come, as most of the action was still down in the depths of the channel and not up near the shallows of the dam. The best chance is during the late morning hours down deep in the channel (20-22 feet) with a jig and minnow or jig and twister tail. At night anglers might want to move out over the 7-15 foot channel drop off and try some countdown Rapalas. The hot colors included the ever faithful yellow, green, or chartreuse and also purple sparkle tail or even just plain white. The locks channel at Voyager Park is still a little iced, but the shoreline is open, although it has not been producing any significant action as of yet. It seems that having a boat to get out to the channel has its advantages right now. The mouth of the river has not been yielding much action so far as well. There has been reports of some large northern caught at the mouth of the river and at Voyager Park, as well as others prowling around. Duck Creek, Suamico River, and the Geano Beach shoreline are all still iced. Unless there is a significant warmup, they will be for a little while.

Manitowoc County - Much of the Manitowoc River remains iced covered. Lower Cato Falls is starting to open up, but access is slippery and open water is minimal. At Manitou Park, the river remains iced over. Anglers on the Branch River have found some open water, which has offered some angling opportunities, but success has been limited. The East Twin River is starting to open up and anglers have been having some success fishing for steelhead in Mishicot below the dam. The Shoto dam on the West Twin River is starting to see more fishing pressure with the warm up in the weather. Success has been mixed, with some steelhead being caught by anglers. The rest of the West Twin has opened up, ending the ice fishing season. Water levels on the West Twin have been high and muddy. The Manitowoc south pier is starting to see more action as anglers are seeing some brown trout. Anglers using spawn sacs have been having the most luck. In the Manitowoc Harbor, the marina remains iced up and although some anglers are still venturing out they have had limited success. Boat anglers should soon be able to use the Manitowoc ramp as the ice is starting to break up and should be open within days. Fishing pressure at the Two Rivers harbor and piers has been low. The ramp at Seagull Marina is open and some anglers have been using it to head toward Manitowoc to fish for brown trout and have had some success trolling crank baits. Anglers are urged to use caution when venturing out onto what ice is left, as it is rapidly deteriorating and conditions are changing rapidly.

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Sturgeon Bay DNR Service Center area

Door County

Peninsula State Park - As of March 28, snow cover was about 5 inches. Ski trails remain fair to poor due to periodic thaws. Only 3 miles of trail remain "skiable" at best. Trail conditions can become variable and icy very rapidly this time of year as the sun gets higher, and more frequent periods of thawing and freezing occur. Snowmobile trails are closed. The sledding hill is closed. Snowshoe/hiking trails are open. Bicycling is prohibited on all trails due to wet conditions. Biking is permitted on all plowed roads. Use extreme caution if you decide to venture onto the frozen waters of Green Bay. Conditions are rapidly changing. Eagle Bluff Lighthouse is closed to tours for the season. Sandhill cranes, redwing blackbirds and robins are back.

Potawatomi State Park - Warm winds are taking their toll on the cross-country ski trails. Some people were skiing earlier this week, but snow is disappearing quickly. With rain in the forecast, this may be the end of the ski season. It has been a long season this year, thanks to the dedicated efforts of the volunteer trail groomers. The small sledding hill in the campground area is closed, as well as the snowmobile trails. People are still ice fishing in Sawyer Harbor and Sturgeon Bay, but they are now walking instead of driving out on the ice. Seven campsites are plowed throughout the winter months. The sites have electric hookups, and water is available in the campground. Vault toilets are open. The entire South Loop of the campground (Sites 1-81) will be open to campers as of April 1. The North Loop (Sites 82-125) will open on May 1. The accessible cabin, shower building, dump station, and fish cleaning station are scheduled to reopen the first part of May. North Norway Road leading to the tower remains closed until the snow melts down. If this warm weather continues, it shouldn't be long before all the roads in the park are again open.

Kewaunee County - Too early for any action yet, as the shoreline is still iced up.

Wautoma DNR Service Center area

Hartman Creek State Park - All cross-country ski trails (Oak Ridge, Hillview & Pope Lake) were in poor condition as of March 29. There were bare spots along with icy conditions. As warmer air filters in this week, trails will become increasingly poor, slushy and eventually not usable. The last snowfall was March 18 and there is – currently about 2 inches on the ground. Trail passes are not required at this time.

Oshkosh DNR Service Center area

Ice conditions have been reduced to foot travel only with the recent warm weather. Walleye fishing was decent on Lakes Poygan and Winnebago the last two weeks. Late ice panfishing was good for those who put their time in. Lake Puckaway's shoreline is in very bad shape; anglers who could get to them were catching nice crappies. Anglers are out after walleyes on the Fox River in Eureka for the annual spring walleye run; water levels are low, but should rise with the anticipated rains. The Wolf River was still frozen from Shiocton down as of Wednesday. Toms have been strutting and gobbling in early mornings, but are still in large wintering groups. Big groups of waterfowl are migrating now.

DNR Southeast Region

Almost all of the snow is gone; and with predicted rains, loss of remaining ice should soon follow. Over the Easter weekend there were a few anglers out on lakes in the northern part of the Region and they caught panfish. In most cases anglers had to lay planks across 4-6 feet of open water along the shoreline to reach good ice. Ice fishing in the southern part is finished for the year as many southern waters are open. By later this week there may be no more ice fishing on any Southeast Region lake or pond. Instead, start getting ready for the shallow water crappie and bluegill bite! (See the detailed inland Sheboygan County report for more on catching open-water panfish early in spring.) Fifty-seven park ponds enrolled in the Urban Fishing Program will soon be stocked with catchable-size rainbow trout. Also, on April 9, free fishing clinics will be held at 13 of these ponds. These clinics are a great chance to learn the latest in fishing techniques from experienced volunteer anglers. No fishing equipment is necessary; but if anglers who have some should bring it along. Until April 30, only youths 15 or younger (and some disabled) can fish in these ponds. For more information on this program, see page 17 of the current fishing regulations or call the Urban Fishing Hotline at (414) 263-8494 or 1-888-347-4563. Turkey gobblers are out displaying for the hens. Sandhill cranes have started heading north; although there still are a lot around. Lots of deer are visible toward evenings in the fields. None have any antlers left. Flocks of robins have moved in; so the "real" Spring should finally be here. Even garter snakes have left their wintering dens to enjoy the sunshine of the last few days.

Sheboygan County - In Sheboygan flows on the Sheboygan and Pigeon rivers are relatively high, and the water is quite muddy. Fishing in both rivers has been slow, but anglers on south pier in Sheboygan have been catching a few brown trout on minnows.

Ozaukee County - In Port Washington anglers have been fishing near the power plant with very little success.

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Milwaukee County - In Milwaukee, shore anglers have been fishing in the inner harbor, and a few browns and walleye have been hitting crankbaits and shiners behind MMSD. In the river at the Summerfest grounds and at Jones Island, browns have been occasionally hitting spawn sacs or tube jigs tipped with wax worms. The majority of access points on upstream stretches of the Milwaukee and Menomonee Rivers are free of ice, but runoff from melting snow has left both tributaries high and muddy. Conditions on Oak Creek are good, but steelhead fishing there has been slow. Boat anglers have been reporting good numbers of brown trout taken near the Oak Creek Power Plant.

Racine County - In Racine flows on the Root River are good, and anglers have been reporting the most success in the morning hours. In Lincoln Park, the majority of steelhead, along with a few browns, have been holding in the deeper pools downstream of the weir. Fishing in Island Park has been slow, but steelhead have been found farther downstream in the Washington Park Golf Course area. Spawn sacs and tube jigs have been providing the most action recently. The Root River Steelhead Facility is up and running, but no processing days have been planned.

Kenosha County - In Kenosha steelhead fishing in the Pike River has been slow, but in the small boat harbor anglers have been taking a few rainbows and browns on spawn sacs or tube jigs tipped with wax worms.

Walworth and inland Racine and Kenosha counties - Ice fishing is winding down. The ice is gone along most shorelines so ice anglers can't get out to the "good" ice on most lakes. A few anglers were shoreline fishing on Honey Creek, the White River, and the Fox River at Burlington but not much was biting.

Washington, eastern Fond du Lac and inland Sheboygan counties - Ice fishing action is quickly coming to a close for this winter. The upcoming warm weather will likely take out much of the remaining ice and leave dangerous conditions on those waters where ice is still present. It is the time now to look for open water fishing opportunities. As the lakes open up, look for panfish action in the shallow bays with dark bottoms. Those areas typically draw a lot of panfish as the dark bottom pulls in a lot of heat from the sunshine. Bluegills and crappies head into those areas after a couple of days of intense sunshine and the fish are hungry. The fisheries crew out of Plymouth will be setting nets on Big Cedar Lake (Washington County) to take a look at the northern pike and walleye populations there. For information on this survey, please call our Plymouth office at (920) 892-8756, Extension 3049. Sheboygan Marsh should be a good place to catch northern pike, bluegills and crappies in coming weeks. Good shoreline access can be found at the Sheboygan Marsh park just northwest of the Village of Elkhart Lake. Northern pike fishing is legal year around in the Marsh and there is no size limit on northerns there. So far, the spring thaw has been slow, allowing much of the water to infiltrate into the ground rather than running off into the streams. The slow thaw should also be beneficial to the survival of young trout in the better trout streams. Those trout are probably less than a month old at this time and survival is typically better when runoff is limited.

Waukesha County - There is 4 to 6 feet of open water along the shoreline of most lakes. Within a week crews should have nets in Pine Lake to assess northern pike and walleye populations. A very lucky angler caught and released a 7.5-pound largemouth bass from Pine Lake last summer! Traditionally this lake has supported some very nice walleyes and large northerns. It will be interesting to see if it still does. For information on this survey please call the Waukesha DNR office at (262) 574-2152.

Kettle Moraine State Forest, Southern Unit - As of March 30 all trails in the state forest were soft and muddy in some areas, snow and ice covered in the heavily shaded areas with a few higher open sites being fairly dry. The mountain bike trails are closed until the trail tread stabilizes and dries out. Hiking trails are open but sloppy to use in areas. Equestrian users are asked to not use the trails until the soils dry and stabilize. This will prevent excessive trail damage that can result from use when the soils are soft and saturated. Some wind predicted over the next couple of days will help to dry things out -- although there is also a prediction for some rain. For up to date trail conditions call the trail information line at (262) 594-6202. Mountain bike trail users are urged to help build some trail at the Southern Unit over then next six Saturdays. The local chapter of WORBA (Wisconsin Off Road Bicycle Association) is organizing workdays beginning Saturday April 2 from 9 a.m. to noon. The project goal this year is to continue constructing a second trail tread for the connector trail between the John Muir and Emma Carlin Trails. This is being done to address the safety hazard of a single trail tread with two way traffic as well as to reconstruct poorly designed sections of the existing trail. This a large undertaking that is very labor intensive. More information about the workdays can be obtained by calling Mike at the General Store (262) 495-8600. This week's workday will meet at Horseriders camp on Little Prairie Road outside of the Village of Palmyra. Ottawa Lake campground and Pinewoods group camp are open for reservations beginning April 1. No flush toilets will be available until the weekend of April 9.

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DNR South Central Region

Dodgeville DNR Service Center area

Grant County - Walleye and Sauger fishing has begun to pick up on the Mississippi River. This past weekend saw an increased number of larger female walleyes below the Dubuque Lock and Dam #11. A few nice eating sized 14 to 17 inch sauger were caught and kept. The fish were concentrated near the dam on the Iowa side near the bullnose as well as out from the fishing barge. Anglers report that fishing has slowed at the Guttenberg lock and Dam #10 with the majority of the fish landed consisting of sauger. The spring melt is commencing from farther up river and the local waters are beginning to rise. The Corps of Engineers is predicting a 50 percent chance of flooding with water levels remaining below previous years' levels although there are reports to considerable snow depths in northwestern Wisconsin and northeastern Minnesota. The spring waterfowl migration is well underway. Bode's pond near Potosi has been a staging area for the last two weeks for many waterfowl species. There is a large concentration of mallards visible on the pond near Highway 133. Several large flocks of white pelicans have been observed at Potosi as well as O'Leary Lake near Dubuque Lock and Dam #11. This past weekend saw large concentrations of bald eagles throughout the Mississippi River with viewing opportunities at Cassville and O'Leary Lake.

Iowa & Sauk counties - Ice has all but melted away on most waters and the Lower Wisconsin Riverway due to warmer temperatures the past week. Fishing has continued to be a challenge for the most part; anglers report slow action but anticipate better action soon due to the melting water and rising temperatures. With the warmer conditions, now is the perfect time to view the numerous duck species that are beginning to pour into the area with concentrations of bluebills, mallards, and hooded mergansers being spotted frequently near Bakken's pond and further west. Geese continue to flock to these areas in high numbers as well and can be seen with sandhill cranes along the same shores.

Horicon DNR Service Center area

Horicon Marsh State Wildlife Area - With the recent warm weather, the spring migration has picked up in earnest. While this year spring is a bit late in arriving, there has been good movement of early migrants in recent days. Sandhill cranes are now widespread and common as they are reclaiming their nesting territories. Red-winged blackbirds are also on territory as the males sing and display awaiting the arrival of the females. The spring songs of the song sparrows have also become a common sound in the outdoors, along with killdeer and Canada geese, while the winter birds are getting ready for the nesting season. Cardinals are singing loudly as white-breasted nuthatches and downy woodpeckers are courting. The first sightings of bluebirds are being reported in southern Wisconsin. The first tree swallows returned to Horicon Marsh on March 30. Waterfowl are still sparse and widespread due to the lack of open water. The chance of rain should quickly soften the ice thereby preparing the way for the arrival of ducks and other waterbirds. In the marshes, the first signs of skunk cabbage are to be seen as the plants are just emerging. Willow buds cracked open within the past week, leading the way for the flowering and leafing out of trees later in the season.

Columbia County - Winter weather has broken and temperatures have started to take out ice and warm waters. Anglers were experiencing success on walleyes and sauger on the Wisconsin River. Canada geese have been migrating through the area and many sandhill cranes have been seen on area fields. Robins and other songbirds are also showing up daily in the Columbia County area. Many whitetail deer are being seen on field edges as new plants emerge.

Fitchburg DNR Service Center area

Dane County - Ice anglers out over the weekend had good luck off on Lake Waubesa and on Barbers Bay on Lake Kegonsa with limits of bluegills, crappies, and a few perch being taken. Shorelines have eroded badly and several anglers fell through the ice in shallow water over the weekend so ice fishing is over for the season. Lake Monona is halfway open and the rest of the lakes should have ice out within a week or two. Many turkey gobblers were observed strutting for flocks of hens last week. Birds migrating back into the area include killdeer, woodcock, snipe, tree swallows, phoebes, bluebirds, and lots of robins and red winged blackbirds. A good size flock of canvasback ducks has been hanging around Fish Camp boat launch on Lake Kegonsa. Tundra swans have also been seen there. Anglers are reminded that the general fishing season closed after March 6. Panfishing is still open on all waters, but anglers should check the fishing regulations for waters that are open all year for species like walleye, northern and bass. Anglers may not fish for those closed season species. Hunters and anglers are reminded that most licenses expire March 31. Boat owners should check their registration because decals bearing 2005 expire on March 31, 2005. Boaters are reminded to check their boats over for safety equipment before heading out onto the water. Life preservers, fire extinguishers, battery covers, lights and more should be checked over before heading out onto the water. All 2005 DNR hunting and fishing licenses are now available at DNR service centers, license vendors, and county clerks offices. The proposed license fee increase has yet to pass, so license fees remain the same.

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Sauk County

Mirror Lake State Park - Cross-country ski trails are closed for the season. Hiking trails are open, some of the trails may still have snow and ice on them.

Jefferson County - Anglers are having good success on the Rock River at the Jefferson Dam catching walleye and sauger. Many small males are being caught but some legal size fish are showing up as well. The fish are biting mostly on a jig and a minnow. A few catfish have been caught recently on the Rock River by Jefferson as well on minnows. At the Jefferson Dam anglers are still catching some white bass along the wall by the Wisconsin Street bridge. They were biting mostly on twistertails. Some crappie have been caught recently at the wastewater treatment plant outlet in Jefferson on small minnows. Most of the crappie are in the 9 inch range. Farther south on the Rock River, just outside Jefferson along Hwy. N, some nice sized walleye in the 20-inch range have been biting. Anglers were catching the fish from boats by vertical jigging using either a jig and minnow or bucktails. By Fort Atkinson, anglers in boats have also been catching walleye and sauger mostly downstream from town. The small male walleye and sauger in this area are beginning to flow with sperm. On the Rock River below the lower dam in Watertown a few walleye and northern pike have been biting. They are biting on a jig and minnow but action has been fairly limited so far.

Rock County - Anglers below Monterey and Beloit dams were having good success catching walleyes this weekend. The anglers in the boats were having better success than the shore anglers. Anglers were jigging with minnows. A few keeper walleyes have been caught but the majority of the walleye that were caught were smaller males. Several boats have been out on the Rock River but the boat docks at the county ramps are not in the water yet. Robins and sandhill cranes were spotted all over Rock County along with various species of waterfowl. Great places to view these birds are near the Newville public boatramp and also Grass Lake.

DNR West Central Region

Baldwin DNR Service Center area

St. Croix County

Willow River State Park - The overnight freeze-daytime thaw cycle has ended along with clear water and normal flow in the Willow River. Runoff is in progress. Poor fishing conditions will prevail during runoff. Rain is predicted this week, which will add to the water level soon. Increased currents in the lake will speed the opening of the lake. Park staff does not monitor ice conditions. Trails still have a mix of conditions from ice to dry. Ski poles or trekking poles are a great hiking accessory this time of year, especially on the hills that have slippery areas. The north facing slopes and shaded areas may have some form of snow or ice on them. Mourning Doves and Turkey Vultures have returned. The deer are still reported as being in large herds. An astronomy program will be given Friday, April 1, 7 to 9 p.m. The alternate date is Saturday, April 2. This is an outdoor program given by an astronomy hobbyist. The program is free. Regular vehicle admission rates apply. The campground will be open to vehicles in mid April. Tent campers may carry in their gear until then. Campers with trailers or motorhomes may use sites 73-78 on the parking lot by the beach. 73-78 have electric hookup. If the office is closed when you arrive, please self-register for camping and vehicle admission as needed.

La Crosse DNR Service Center area

Song sparrows, turkey vultures, wood ducks, and eastern meadowlarks returned to the area last week. Wild turkey winter flocks are dispersing and toms have started gobbling and assembling their harems.

Crawford County - The Mississippi, Wisconsin, and the Kickapoo rivers' water levels rose a little this week. The Mississippi River stage jumped up a bit to 8.2 feet. The combination of warm temperatures, the sun's energy and current have been melting most of the back water ice. Any remaining ice on the backwaters of the Mississippi River and Wisconsin River is very dangerous. Most sloughs and backwater lakes have opened up. The Mississippi and Wisconsin rivers' main channels are open. Barge traffic has started on the Mississippi so boaters should use caution. The only snow that can be found in the county is on the north facing slopes and down in the deep coulees. Ice fishing success was pretty much non-existent this week mainly due to the lack of ice or dangerous ice conditions. Foot access to most areas is impossible. A few have used air boats or Hoover craft to access some areas. Cold Spring's ice cap is really shrinking and only a small portion on the south is ice covered. The shoreline at the boat landing has opened up and no access to the ice exits there any more. Some anglers have been fishing for bluegills and crappie from the shoreline with poor success. In the Prairie du Chien area the Ambo Slough is now open downstream past the DNR boat landing. Foot access to Tilmont, Mud Slough, the Doubles, Big Missouri, and other backwaters on the west side is no longer available. Gremore Lake is opening up also and no ice fishing activity is happening there either. Ice fishing in the Sturgeon Lake (McGregor Lake) area has been pretty much the same as other areas. Sturgeon Lake is pretty much open as are the other sloughs in that area.

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Most of the ice fishing along Hwy. 60 in the Wisconsin River backwaters is pretty much over because the ice conditions are very dangerous. Walleye and sauger action at the Lynxville dam was spotty this week. There were some nice sized walleyes and some sauger taken this past week but overall the fishing there has been slow. Some days the small saugers and some walleyes bit really well. Most anglers were catching fish on blue/white, chartreuse, purple jigs tipped with similar color plastics. Some anglers were using minnows while others were not. Most were vertical jigging while drifting but some have had luck long lining, hand lining, and trolling. Some anglers avoided the crowds and fished the wing dams with some success. The sauger action slowed somewhat this week out in front of Lawler Park in Prairie du Chien on the East Channel. Some were still finding active fish. Hundreds of bald eagles can still be seen from Prairie du Chien to DeSoto along the Mississippi River and up the Wisconsin River. Bird watchers will see eagles perched along Hwy. 35. The largest concentration of eagles seems to be around the Ferryville area. Many Canada geese are already seeking nesting sites. Numerous duck species can be seen on the Mississippi Pools and backwaters. Most song birds are starting to "sound off" as the days continue to get longer. The time is right to clean out bird nesting boxes. Large numbers of robins, red winged blackbirds, grackles and Great Blue Heron have returned to the area. Tom turkeys have been heard gobbling and seen strutting in the county.

La Crosse River, Elroy-Sparta & 400 state trails - La Crosse, Monroe, Juneau and Sauk county snowmobile trails are closed. Hikers please remember that trails can become soft when temperatures are above freezing. The tunnels on the Elroy-Sparta trail, walk-in campgrounds located near Sparta and Elroy, and the Kendall Depot Trail Headquarters will open May 1.

Eau Claire DNR Service Center area

Chippewa Moraine Ice Age State Recreation Area - Maple sap is starting to run so visitors to the area may see local residents working in the 'sugar woods.' With temperatures in the 60s, snow is speedily melting away and trails are slippery and slushy in spots. Ice fishing was still good on area lakes, but with thinning ice and slush on top of the ice, caution should be taken. Sandhill cranes, eastern bluebirds, and great blue herons are starting to arrive back. Late spring will be a great time to view the heron rookery located near the trail and with 40 plus nesting pairs there is generally a lot of activity. Ask the Interpretive Center staff for detailed rookery locations.

Hoffman Hills State Recreation Area - Some Woodcock have started their courtship flights and calls. Best place to see and hear this is at the Overflow parking lot near the marsh area a little after sunset. Cranes are back in the area and many waterfowl are too. Frogs should start singing real soon. Some bluebirds are checking out the nesting boxes.

Red Cedar State Trail - The trail still has some ice and snow on it and the frost is coming out. It will take a couple of weeks before trail has firmed up for riding on. Lots of waterfowl passing through along the river as well as a few osprey and eagles.

Chippewa River State Trail -. The trail is mostly clear of snow and ice but there is some in the shady areas still. Lots of waterfowl and a few osprey and eagles to be seen along the river.

Lake Wissota State Park - Cross-country ski trails are closed for the season. Hiking trails range from bare ground to 4 inches of snow. Low spots can be wet or icy. Snowshoe hiking is done for the season. Most people are walking the park roads. The campground is open. However, campground roads are not plowed during winter months. This week's rain is expected to melt much of the snow on the campground roads. Pack in camping is allowed if you can't drive in. The shower/flush toilet building in the right loops (sites 1-41) usually open around April 15. The weather this spring may delay opening until April 21. Ice is over 14 inches thick at the boat-landing bay. However, ice has receded from the shoreline. A few anglers have picked their spots to get on and are ice fishing. Be sure to test the ice thickness before venturing onto the water.

Wisconsin Rapids DNR Service Center area

Buckhorn State Park - Trails are no longer skiable due to the spring thaw. The ice is slowly melting from the lake. The lake is open by the Buckhorn bridge but boat launches are still iced over. One walleye every 15 minutes was caught by one fisherman this week, most being undersized. Sandhill cranes and geese have been seen and heard in the park and trees are starting to bud. Spring flowers and wildlife are great for taking photos for the annual photo contest. Campsites 8, 9, 16 are open for winter tent camping. Site 8 has electric and can accommodate trailers. All other sites are closed. The park's main gate and campsites 1- 25 will be opening on April 18. If the weather is cooperative, the main gate will open on Friday, April 15. Until then, please use the winter parking area located on Czech Avenue at the south end of the park. Please remember that our mound stairway is not maintained for winter use and may be slippery. There are still openings for the accessible cabin for May and October. 2005 Youth Deer hunt applications are now available. Call (608) 565-2789.

Roche-A-Cri State Park - The spring northbound migration of loons, ducks, and geese has begun through the area. Sandhill cranes and turkey vultures are returning to the park. Our four miles of cross-country ski trails are snow covered, with occasional thinner sections. Due to the recent warm weather, the snow has become very coarse and compact, and cannot be groomed. The mound stairway is not maintained for winter use.

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UPCOMING EVENTS AT STATE PARKS, FORESTS, AND TRAILS WATCHABLE WILDLIFE OPPORTUNITIES AND INTERPRETIVE PROGRAMS

Check with the park or forest of your choice for additional activities and special events not listed. Most events are free of charge; park admission sticker required unless otherwise noted. **Events and times subject to change.**

Friday, April 1, 2005

- **Kettle Moraine State Forest--Northern Unit**, Campbellsport, (920) 533-8322 - Storytime: Pink-Toed 'Possums. What has pink toes, a hairless tail and a pouch? An opossum, of course! Discover other interesting facts about the only North American mammal with a pouch. This hour of nature fun awaits 3- to 6-year-olds with accompanying adults. Ice Age Visitor Center. 9:30-10:30 a.m.

Saturday, April 2, 2005

- **Havenwoods State Forest**, Milwaukee, (414) 527-0232 - Family Program: Incredible Eggs. Chickens aren't the only ones that come from eggs. Lots of animal babies hatch out of them. We'll spend the morning discovering who lays eggs and why they come in different shapes, sizes, and colors. We'll even dissect a real egg! This program is for children ages 4-12 and their parents, grandparents, or adult friends; it is not intended for groups or organizations. 10:30 a.m. - noon.
- **MacKenzie Environmental Education Center**, Poynette, - **Maplefest**. Sponsored by Friends of MacKenzie and the Department of Natural Resources. 9 a.m. - 2 p.m. **Pancake Breakfast**. An all-you-can eat pancake breakfast; Dark of the Moon Contra Band will play folk music beginning at 9 a.m. Sponsored by Poynette Optimist Club. Resident Center Lodge. 8 a.m. - noon **Tours, Demonstrations, and Exhibits**. Watch maple trees being tapped for their sap and the sap being made into maple syrup; see wildlife and other exhibits; buy maple products, souvenirs, and refreshments. Sponsored by Friends of MacKenzie and DNR. 9 a.m. - 2 p.m. **Horse-drawn Wagon Rides**. Free rides. 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. Raffle. Sponsored by Friends of MacKenzie. Winners will be announced at 1 p.m.
- **Richard Bong State Recreation Area**, Kansasville, (262) 878-5600 - **Spring Bird Hike**. Bring your binoculars and we will try to spot spring birds. Trails will be wet; dress for hiking. Meet at the Visitor Center. 7-9: a.m. **Beginners' Fly Tying Workshop**. Join angler Jason Suleski to create a simple Steelhead Yarn Fly. You will go home with your own handmade creation. Equipment is provided but if you have a vise, please bring it. Please call (262) 878-5607 to preregister and prepay the \$5 fee. Meet at the Visitor Center. 10 a.m.- noon.

Saturday, April 9, 2005

- **Havenwoods State Forest**, Milwaukee, (414) 527-0232 - Discovery Saturdays: Play in the Mud. Now that the snow has melted, there is lots of mud to play with! Come and use microscopes to observe tiny living creatures in the mud, and take a close-up look at some worms. Discovery Saturdays are for all ages. Just drop in the building anytime to participate in the fun. 9 a.m. - noon.
- **Kettle Moraine State Forest--Northern Unit**, Campbellsport, (920) 533-8322. Family Program: All Tied Up in Knots. There is a knot for every kind of job. Learn how to tie some basic knots and how to do some simple lashing. To practice your new skills, you will lash together a special project. Please call by April 7 to register. This program is best for families with children over the age of 8 years. Ice Age Visitor Center. 9:30-11:30 a.m.
- **Richard Bong State Recreation Area**, Kansasville, (262) 878-5600 - Four-season Gardening. Join gardener Pam Nelson to learn how perennials can make your garden bloom all year! Meet at the Visitor Center. 10-11 a.m.

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Department of Natural Resources – CE/6
PO Box 7921 Madison WI 53707-7921

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Outdoor Report is a compilation of outdoor recreation information from DNR offices around the state. A variety of DNR staff, including conservation wardens, fish and wildlife biologists, naturalists, educators and customer service representatives, contribute information to the Outdoor Report. The Outdoor Report is issued each Thursday with information gathered in the previous week. People traveling to or within Wisconsin should call ahead to where they will be traveling for the most current conditions. Additional recreation information can be found on the Department of Tourism Web site at <http://www.travelwisconsin.com>.

